

Critical Theory Brings Chaos to Our Streets



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The violence and hatred currently roiling this country—where does it come from? For those of us who have been following the antics of the left for nearly half a century, the answer is quite clear: from Germany, via the U.S. educational system.

When you’ve been raised to hate your country—to see it as historically illegitimate and in dire need of

“fundamental transformation,” to quote Barack Obama—then, in a time of relative international peace, there can be no moral crusade higher or more important than its destruction. Because, according to the Manichean logic of the American left, the perfect must always and everywhere be the enemy of the good.

What do they propose to replace Western civilization with?—the answer is: nothing.

The source of this inhuman lie is the Frankfurt School, a group of Marxist professorial refugees from Nazi Germany who, in the wake of the communists’ defeat by their fellow leftists of the National Socialist German Workers Party, established a secure beachhead at Columbia University, to which they transplanted something with the anodyne name of the Frankfurt-based Institute for Social Research, and in which they developed their doctrine of “critical theory” to be spread to educational institutions across the country.

Critical theory’ is the very essence of satanism: rebellion for the sake of rebellion against an established order that has obtained for eons, and with no greater promise for the future than destruction.

As I wrote in my 2015 book, “The Devil’s Pleasure Palace,” a philosophical examination of the Frankfurters and the havoc they wrought on the nation that gave them a safe harbor from Hitler and National Socialism, critical theory “holds that there is no received tenet of civilization that should not either be questioned (the slogan ‘question authority’ originated with the Frankfurt School) or attacked.

“Our cultural totems, shibboleths, and taboos are declared either completely arbitrary or the result of a long-ago ‘conspiracy,’ steadfastly maintained down through the ages ... In its purest form, which is to say its most malevolent form, Critical Theory is the very essence of satanism:

rebellion for the sake of rebellion against an established order that has obtained for eons, and with no greater promise for the future than destruction.”

A store owner looks at the damage to his office furniture business that was torched the previous evening during another night of unrest in Kenosha, Wis., on Aug. 25, 2020.

What we’re seeing today on the streets of Portland, Kenosha, Seattle, and elsewhere is critical theory in practice: No longer simply the province of crabby old nihilists, some of them sexual deviants, with Dr. Strangelove accents and communist malice in their corrupted souls, critical theory has gone mainstream.

The American left’s attempts at violent revolution, such as in 1968, are now being realized to their fullest extent yet.

One by one, the pillars of the American past and our Constitution—the cream of Enlightenment thought—are being knocked down, not to symbolically redress any real or imagined wrongs, but for the sake of destruction itself. Which, according to Frankfurt dogma, is the whole point. In answer to the question often asked by clueless conservatives—what do they propose to replace Western civilization with?—the answer is: nothing.

Critical theory is therefore merely another name for vengeful anarchy, and in the Democratic Party, it has found the ideal vehicle for its political expression. The process began in the 1960s when one of the most prominent Frankfurters, Herbert Marcuse, emerged as a kind of guru to American college radicals—the “love children”—of that era, preaching his doctrine of “repressive tolerance,” which might best be explained as “tolerance for me, but not for thee.”

Or, in Marcuse’s own words: “This means that the ways should not be blocked on which a subversive majority could develop, and if they are blocked by organized repression and indoctrination, their reopening may require apparently undemocratic means. They would include the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc. ... Liberating tolerance, then, would mean intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left.”

Organized Anarchy

America has been through periods of organized anarchy before—the oxymoron is only apparently contradictory—in which icons and shibboleths have been smashed and prominent leaders assassinated.

At the turn of the last century, for example, a wave of assassination swept Europe and America, claiming the lives of the Empress Elisabeth of Austria, King Umberto I of Italy, and U.S. President William McKinley, all murdered within three years of each other. Indeed,

McKinley's shooting death at the hands of Leon Czolgosz in 1901 capped a period of lawlessness that began circa 1864 with the International Workingmen's Association, which embraced socialists, communists (Marx was a founding member), trade unionists, and anarchists—in today's parlance, social justice warriors all.

It's interesting to note as well that this period almost exactly comprises one of the darkest stretches of U.S. history, which saw the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln by a Southern Democrat; the murder of James Garfield by a sex-cult lunatic, and McKinley by an anti-religious anarchist. In other words, three of the first six Republican presidents were murdered by their political or social opponents.

Even the lone Democrat to fall to the gun, John F. Kennedy, was shot by a selfproclaimed Marxist and defector to the Soviet Union.

Anarchism continued to plague the nation through the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, two Italian immigrants convicted in 1921, perhaps wrongly, of murder during an armed robbery in Massachusetts, and well into the 1950s with the "mad bomber," George Metesky, who terrorized New York City with a string of bombings from 1940 to 1956, striking Grand Central Station, Macy's, and the Staten Island Ferry, among other places.

Metesky, who maimed without remorse, turned out to be a disgruntled worker for Consolidated Edison, the power company, angry over a rejected disability claim that dated back to 1931.

Black Lives Matter

Now, the anarchists have returned in the form of the neo-Marxist Black Lives Matter movement, which has little to do with saving black lives (see, for example, the appalling murder rate in Chicago, which goes unremarked on the left) and everything to do with faddish revolutionary causes.

"We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location," reads its manifesto.

"We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable. We foster a queer_affirming network ... We embody and practice justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another."

Joining them has been the cowardly Antifa, largely comprised of soy boys with backpacks and skateboards whose preferred method of combat is to swarm lone victims and sucker-punch them, smash plate-glass windows, and set car dealerships on fire.

They are direct descendants of the “Antifaschistische Aktion” alliance of Communists and Social Democrats in Weimar Germany, which battled the brownshirts of the National Socialists in the streets. And in case you haven’t noticed the resemblance, the American Antifa logo is effectively identical to the one used by their German forbears.

In short, we can draw a straight line from the Frankfurt School’s origins in Germany and transplantation to America, through the 1960s and into our own time. Over the course of what my colleague and publisher Roger Kimball has described as the left’s “Long March” through the institutions (the phrase derives from Mao’s 1934 retreat and regrouping during the Chinese civil war between Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists and Mao’s Communists), the American left’s attempts at violent revolution, such as in 1968, are now being realized to their fullest extent yet.

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Encouraging Violence

The result has been death and destruction on a scale we haven’t witnessed since the late ’60s. That it has been tacitly and even overtly encouraged by Democrat politicians is an ongoing national disgrace.

“This is a movement, I’m telling you,” said Sen. Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for vice president, a few months ago. “They’re not going to stop before Election Day in November, and they’re not going to stop after Election Day. They’re not going to let up, and they should not. And we should not.”

If that’s not an unveiled threat, it’s hard to say what it is. But the opportunistic Harris, the party’s favorite, who failed miserably in her attempt to win the presidential nomination earlier in the year but now is poised to take over immediately for a doddering Joe Biden should he somehow win in the fall, is only one of many Democrat politicians irresponsibly and enthusiastically egging on the mayhem in the name of “social justice,” or blaming it on conservatives, who are always supposed to just sit back and take whatever the left feels like dishing out.

But when the word “justice” requires a modifier, it’s no longer justice, any more than Marcuse’s “repressive tolerance” was actually tolerance. Instead, it’s simply the havoc of bitter political losers, to be wreaked on America for the crime of existing. It’s a German philosophical import that needs to be rejected as thoroughly as National Socialism was in 1945.

Michael Walsh is the editor of The-Pipeline. org and the author of “The Devil’s Pleasure Palace” and “The Fiery Angel,” both published by Encounter Books. His latest book, “Last Stands,” a cultural study of military history from the Greeks to the Korean War, will be published in December by St. Martin’s Press.